

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 14TH JULY, 1881.

Mr. MACANDREW in the Chair.

Mr. MCKERROW, Surveyor-General, examined.

1. *Mr. Pyke.*] Altitude alone does not count in the matter of the fitness of interior Otago for grain-growing?—I am aware of this, and that as you approach the Lakes the climate becomes considerably ameliorated. Elevation is very material as regards grain-growing, but it is modified by other circumstances. Altitude, however, has most to do in determining climatic influences. The Crown Terraces are cropped at from 1,600 to 2,000 feet. It would not be possible to grow such crops at that height near the coast. Flagstaff, near Dunedin, is 2,200 feet in height; but settlers who have made the experiment on the flanks of that mountain have found that they could not ripen oats properly. The reason is that all along the coast-line of Otago, and for thirty miles inland, the country is subject to south-westerly weather, which is very severe; but from that distance inland, up to the Southern Alps, it is a different climate altogether, the interior being protected by the coast ranges from the south-westerly weather, and by the Southern Alps from the North-west. There is more sun, so that with inferior soil you can grow a better quality of wheat in the interior—at the Wakatipu, for instance—than on the Taieri, near Dunedin. That climate extends from Moa Flat upwards.

2. You speak of inferior soil. In what sense do you use that word?—As regards its capacity for growing crops; in regard to weight of crop and permanency. For instance: on the lower Taieri Plain they have grown wheat in successive crops for twelve or thirteen years, without any apparent exhaustion of the soil, by simply ploughing a little deeper and turning up fresh alluvium; but in the interior of Otago there are shingly plains which have not that depth of soil.

3. Would it surprise you to learn that for fifteen successive years white crops have been grown on the same land with good result?—It would not surprise me in particular instances, but it would be very unfair to generalize from such instances.

4. It would surprise you to learn that it is the case generally?—I may say that, except in possibly one or two cases, no such thing has been done.

5. You suggest in your memorandum the laying off of land for pastoral purposes in, “say twice the depth to the width.” Do you mean by that, that you would include the flat agricultural country in the portions proposed to be re-leased?—I would include as much flat as would be wanted for winter country to work the higher country, and for homestead purposes. This would be essential; the hill country cannot otherwise be availed of.

6. What do you call winter country?—All country above the winter snow line, which line varies from 1,600 to 3,000 feet. I consider it is absolutely necessary, on every run, that a portion of land under 2,000 feet of altitude should be included in the lease for homestead purposes. In other words, I say it is nearly impossible in interior Otago for people to find homestead sites above that level. There are only one or two places where they could do so; the Crown Terrace is wholly exceptional, you could not parallel it in any other part of the country in Otago. The homesteads must be situate below an altitude of 2,000 feet, for the obvious reason that all land over 2,000 feet, except this Crown Terrace, is generally on a hanging slope, and very steep; the climate, moreover, is such that no one would care to live above that level. The necessity for having low land for the stock in winter is another reason.

7. Is it in your knowledge that the flat land is *not* used for running stock over in winter in Otago?—It is within my knowledge that it *is*.

8. Are you acquainted with the Hawkesburn Run, behind the Bannockburn, near Cromwell?—I know that country. I should think that a man would put his sheep down on the flat country there in winter; that is where he would put them. But no sane man would do so under present circumstances, because there are so many diggers there, with their dogs, which makes him keep his sheep away from the best part of the run.

9. Putting aside diggers and dogs, would the lessee put his sheep on that frozen flat in winter, or on the sunny slopes?—My opinion is this: that, if there were no miners on the run, a wise sheep-farmer would herd his sheep on the Carrick Ranges, 3,000 to 5,000 feet high, till about the end of April or beginning of May, when he would bring them down to the lower hills, the feed on which he would have saved during summer to carry his sheep in winter.

10. But I want to elicit from you whether flat country is not the worst country in winter to put sheep upon?—Yes, not only in winter, but in summer. The flat is shingly; the valuable country is on the lower slopes of the mountains.

11. I believe the proposal is that hill farms should be disposed of by pastoral deferred payment, immediate payment, and lease?—Yes.

12. The lease terminable at a fixed period?—Yes, ten years.

13. Is it proposed to open any of this land for hill farming on a system similar to that of agriculture leases?—No.

14. Is it proposed to give a chance to men desirous of investing their capital, but to whom it would be excessively inconvenient to live upon the land?—Yes, leasing or purchase would give them a chance.

15. But, supposing a man without money; would you not give him a chance on deferred payment?—People without money should have nothing to do with land at all.

16. But, in the case of traders, miners, and other people saving money, what opportunity will they have?—The law will permit them to lease—they can lease a small run, but they can acquire no right to